

**DRAFT Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission—THIS DRAFT HAS NOT YET BEEN REVIEWED OR APPROVED BY THE COMMISSION**

**Minutes of the Cambridge Historical Commission**

April 2, 2020 - 795 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge City Hall and online via Zoom Meeting - 6:00 P.M.

Members present (online): Bruce Irving, *Chair*; Susannah Tobin, *Vice Chair*; Joseph Ferrara, Chandra Harrington, Elizabeth Lyster, Caroline Shannon, Jo Solet, *Members*; Gavin Kleespies, Paula Paris, Kyle Sheffield, *Alternates*

Members absent: none

Staff present (at City Hall): Charles Sullivan, *Executive Director*, Sarah Burks, *Preservation Planner*

Public present: See attached list.

Due to statewide emergency actions limiting the size of public gatherings in response to COVID-19, this meeting was held online with remote participation and was closed to in-person attendance to anyone other than staff. The public was able to participate online via the Zoom webinar platform. The meeting ID was 8317951630.

With all members and alternates present, Mr. Irving called the meeting to order at 6:09 P.M. He explained the online meeting instructions and public hearing procedures then introduced the commissioners and staff. He dispensed with the consent agenda procedure.

Public Hearing: Alterations to Designated Properties

**Case 4143 (Amendment): 163 Brattle St., by The Kung Family Trust.** Amend design of paths, deck and steps.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and explained the siting of the house with entrance toward the river and the back facing Brattle Street. He explained that a previous application to extend a deck around the bay window had been approved by the Commission, but the owner now had an alternate proposal.

Susie Nacco, landscape architect, explained that she had been consulted by the owner about drainage and planting; then they worked out a new concept for the access from the parking area to the door closest to the kitchen on the street side of the building. Instead of extending the deck around the bay window, where snow and ice would be a problem in winter, she proposed constructing a heated bluestone walkway from the parking area to a new set of steps on the east side of the bay window. The plan still included a landing and steps to the French doors nearest the parking area on the west elevation. The existing stairs closest to Brattle Street had no handrail. She proposed adding a simple black iron railing at all three stairs, with detailing similar to the railing at the sidewalk steps. The fence near the parking area would be eliminated and one light on each side of the steps to the kitchen door would be added.

Mr. Sullivan summarized the previous design proposal and the suggested changes.

Mr. Irving asked for questions of fact from the Commission.

Mr. Ferrara asked about the detailing of the steps and railing. Ms. Nacco answered that the prior approval had been to match the porch balustrade details for the extension of the porch deck, however, Ms. Burks had suggested that a simple metal stair railing might be less obtrusive than wood. Ms. Lyster asked why a metal railing. Ms. Nacco said it could be either wood balusters or a metal railing. Should all three

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stairs have matching railings or should the existing stair just be different and not change?

Ms. Shannon asked for clarification about what the wood handrail option would look like. Ms. Nacco described the railing, matching the baluster design of the porch railing.

Dr. Solet asked if a new stair was necessary, when the path could just connect to the existing stair closest to Brattle Street. Ms. Nacco said it was an additional 40 feet of path to travel to reach that set of stairs. Dr. Solet said she understood the desire for a set of stairs near the kitchen.

Mr. Irving asked for questions of fact from the public.

Marilee Meyer of 10 Dana Street asked if the new landing at the French doors would extend to the bay window. Ms. Nacco replied in the negative. Ms. Meyer asked if a handrail at the existing porch stairs closest to Brattle Street would be applied on the left or right side. Ms. Nacco answered it would be on the left. Ms. Meyer asked if other railing options had been considered. Ms. Nacco said they had considered a stock railing but it looked incongruous next to the existing balustrade.

Mr. Irving opened public comment.

Ms. Meyer said a metal railing could be painted white, but black looked institutional like at Harvard, not residential. The color black would make it look more prominent.

Mr. Irving closed the public comment period.

Dr. Solet said she had a black metal railing on both her front and side porch steps. They tend to disappear to the eye and she would support that approach.

Mr. Ferrara said it would be busy looking to add the middle stair, but he understood it was a practical accommodation. He said there must be an appropriate way to do it in wood and suggested that the landing at the side door be more generously sized.

Ms. Harrington said she understood the practicality, but it didn't seem quite right.

Mr. Sullivan described the original deck on the east side of (but not around) the bay window and along the west side to the French doors. He recommended reconstructing those decks and balustrades to match the photographs, eliminating the new deck around the bay window, and extending the heated path over to a new stair to the covered porch, perpendicular to the existing stair. He recommended adding a metal handrail to the existing stair and painted wood handrails at the other two stairs. Ms. Nacco expressed support for the relocation of the new stair, closer to the kitchen door and perpendicular to the existing porch stair. It was a better location because covered. Mr. Sullivan recommended delegating details to the staff.

Mr. Kleespies and Ms. Paris expressed support for Mr. Sullivan's suggestions. Mr. Sheffield asked how old the deck on the west corner was. Mr. Sullivan said the deck remained but the original balustrade was missing. Mr. Sheffield noted that he was not voting since he was an alternate. Mr. Sheffield's

audio feed started having problems.

Dr. Solet moved to approve an amended certificate of appropriateness for the deck, stairs, and path as described by Mr. Sullivan and with details delegated to staff approval. Ms. Harrington seconded the motion. There was no discussion on the motion, which passed in a roll call vote of 7-0.

Public Hearing: Demolition Review

**Case 4311: Cambridge Common, by City of Cambridge.** Install temporary signs regarding woman suffrage art piece.

Ms. Burks showed slides and reported that the woman suffrage public art project was moving ahead to the artist selection process. The temporary A-frame signs would be displayed for approximately 3 weeks on the Cambridge Common. Their purpose was to bring awareness to the process and to provide information to the public about how to view and comment on the design proposals. The students of Cambridge Rindge & Latin's Her Vote Club had been consulted about the content and design of the signs.

Mr. Irving asked if there were questions of fact from the commissioners.

Dr. Solet asked if the signs would be anchored to the ground. Would someone steal the sign bases? Ms. Burks answered that they were not proposed to be anchored to the ground but the signs were typically quite heavy so it was unlikely that someone would steal them.

Ms. Paris asked if they would be blown over by the wind. Ms. Burks said they were designed for stability in outdoor settings. They would be provided by the Department of Public Works, which uses them frequently in other outdoor locations. The sign boards would be vinyl and weatherproof.

Mr. Irving asked for questions of fact from the public.

Ms. Meyer asked how the students would be involved. Ms. Burks explained that one of the committee members was a graphic designer who had met with the student club to ask their thoughts on a preliminary design and content for the signs.

Mr. Irving asked for public comment but there was none. He closed the public comment period.

Ms. Shannon moved to approve a temporary certificate of appropriateness for the signs as submitted. Ms. Paris seconded the motion. Dr. Solet said the record should show the concern about them being stolen or blowing over. The motion passed in a roll call vote of the members 7-0.

**Case 4312: 50 Quincy St., by Cambridge Society of the New Jerusalem and Massachusetts New Church Union.** Install bluestone paving stones on front lawn in labyrinth design.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and explained that the Swedenborg Chapel had been designated a Cambridge landmark about twenty years ago.

Mark Careaga, the architect, thanked the Commission for its efforts to landmark the church because it had helped save it from demolition or inappropriate redevelopment. He noted the existing bluestone plaza in front of the chapel. He said the labyrinth would be paved with the same material. He

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explained that labyrinths had a long history for Christian churches. The church is located in the heart of the Harvard campus and the labyrinth was intended as a gesture to the campus and the neighborhood. He said it would enhance the public view of the church. It would be 20 feet in diameter, with rougher cut stones than in the plaza. Smooth river stone would be used to fill the gaps between the pavers. He noted that maintaining the lawn was difficult. He pointed out that the plan incorrectly stated that the existing free-standing sign would be relocated, but now the church just wanted to remove it. Another sign near the stone wall would remain in place. Benches might be proposed in the future but not at this time.

Mr. Irving asked for questions of fact from the commissioners.

Ms. Lyster asked if the other sign conveyed the same information as the one to be removed. Mr. Careaga answered that it only said “Swedenborg Chapel,” but most people find their information online. He noted that three other congregations share the chapel for worship services at different times.

Mr. Irving asked for questions of fact from the public.

Ms. Meyer asked about note number five. Mr. Careaga said it meant that if there were disruptions to areas outside the scope of work, those areas would be returned to their previous condition. Ms. Meyer asked if staff would be shown samples of the stone or was the stone shape up to the owner/contractor. Mr. Careaga said the drawing was not totally prescriptive and the stonemason would have some latitude in laying out the stones.

Mr. Irving closed the public comment period.

Mr. Ferrara said the building was one of his favorites. He supported the design and hoped moss would grow between the pavers.

Ms. Lyster indicated her desire to see the finished labyrinth.

Ms. Shannon said it would be a nice complement to the labyrinth that is the GSD.

Dr. Solet asked if the plans showed the scale and approximate number of stones. She agreed that moss between the pavers would be nicer than river stones. Small stones could move around and get messy or hard to walk on.

Ms. Tobin and Ms. Paris both expressed support for the application.

Mr. Irving said hoping moss to grow was not as sure a thing as using small stones to fill the gaps.

Mr. Kleespies said he had no objection to removing the free-standing sign.

Ms. Burks read a comment from Mr. Sheffield in the Zoom chat window that he had been married at the chapel and the labyrinth would be a nice feature for the site.

Mr. Ferrara moved to approve a Certificate of Appropriateness for the application as presented.

Ms. Tobin seconded the motion.

James Williamson of 1000 Jackson Place joined the meeting and asked to be recognized for

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comment.

Mr. Irving indicated that he had already closed the public comment period. The motion passed 7-0 with a roll call vote of the members.

Director's Report

Mr. Sullivan had nothing to report.

Preservation Awards Nominations

Mr. Sullivan said there would be no in-person awards event this spring. He recommended that the awards be postponed until fall or held online if no in-person event was possible. He suggested that a decision on the nominated projects be continued to the next meeting.

Minutes

There was a consensus to defer consideration of the minutes of the January and March 2020 meetings until the next meeting.

Preservation Grants

**PG 20-4: 156 Prospect St., by Just-A-Start.** Request of \$50,000 grant for repairs, porch railing and windows.

**PG 20-5: 71 Hammond St., by Cambridge Housing Authority.** Request of \$50,000 grant for repairs to the slate roof, restoring the carved frieze over the front porch, siding on the round bay, and gutters.

Mr. Sullivan showed slides and described the proposed scope for both applications. He reported that there was a little over \$200,000 in the grant budget. He recommended a grant of \$50,000 for 156 Prospect Street and \$50,000 for 71 Hammond Street.

Dr. Solet asked if the Commission could require a material other than pressure treated wood for the porch at 156 Prospect Street.

Mr. Irving noted that the spec was not for the typical pressure treated wood, but for acetylated New Zealand pine which was a very good product with an approximate 40-year warranty. He said sustainable cedar was in short supply. He recommended the acetylated pine product.

Mr. Kleespies said he grew up near 71 Hammond Street. It was falling apart before the Cambridge Housing Authority bought it. The CHA had been very good steward of the property.

Mr. Williamson said he had difficulty logging into the meeting with the meeting number, but the URL worked. He asked who gets to live at 71 Hammond Street? Mr. Sullivan answered that it had been used as a group home for adults with special needs since 1991. Mr. Williamson said it was a handsome building and would be a nice place to live.

Mr. Irving apologized for the difficulty in logging into the meeting and noted that the Commission and staff were trying hard to make the new format work.

Mr. Williamson said the Zoom platform could leave out a lot of people from participating. The

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Commission should consider which hearings to go forward with and which to postpone.

John Hawkinson of CambridgeDay.com asked about the interplay between the construction moratorium and the approval of grant projects. Mr. Sullivan said there was no strict time-out for grants, but approval now meant that the agencies could continue with their fundraising and prepare construction documents so that they would be ready to go when the moratorium was lifted.

Dr. Solet moved to approve both grants at the amounts recommended by Mr. Sullivan. Ms. Harrington seconded the motion. The motion passed in a roll call vote of 7-0.

Dr. Solet moved to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Ferrara seconded the motion, which passed unanimously by roll call vote. The meeting adjourned at 10:30 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah L. Burks  
Preservation Planner

**Members of the Public  
Present on the Zoom Online Meeting, April 2, 2020**

Marilee Meyer	10 Dana Street
Susie Nacco	Medford, MA
John Hawkinson	Cambridgeday.com
Mark Careaga	50 Quincy Street
James Williamson	1000 Jackson Place
Jennifer Mathews	City Manager's office, 795 Mass. Ave.

Note: Town is Cambridge, unless otherwise indicated.